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ABSTRACT

In this experiment two variables relevant to explaining the social support phenomenon were investigated. Response position of the partner (first vs fourth) and contact between partner and S prior to the group situation (contact vs. no contact) were manipulated. Male and female Ss responded to visual, information, and opinion items in a group pressure situation. Results indicated that while social support in both the first and fourth positions significantly reduced conformity compared to a unanimous condition, support in Position 1 was significantly more effective than in Position 4. In addition, contact with the supporter increased conformity in the unanimous condition, but decreased conformity in both social support conditions. Possible mechanisms underlying the position and contact effects were discussed. (Author)

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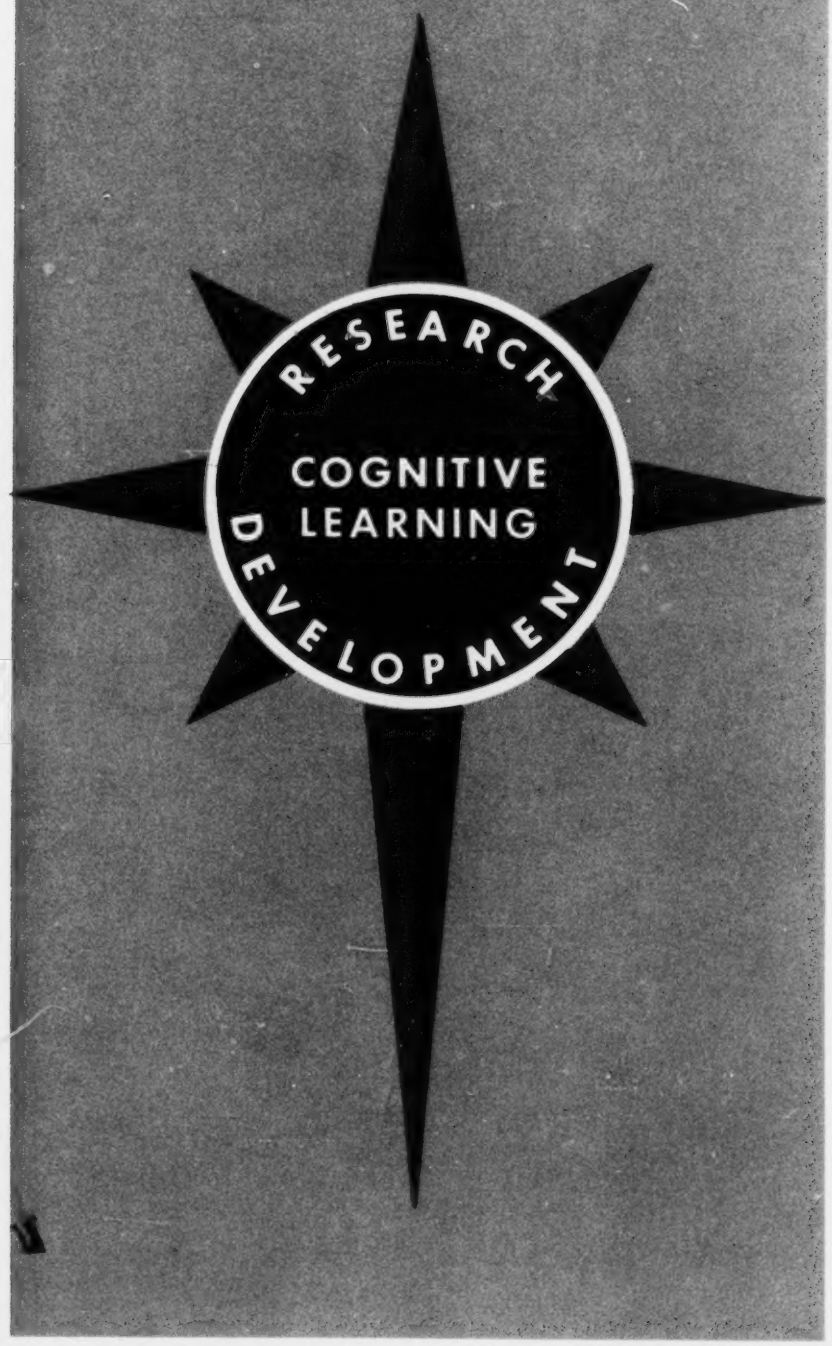

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SOCIAL SUPPORT AND CONFORMITY: THE EFFECT OF DIFFERENTIATION FROM THE GROUP AND ORDER OF RESPONDING

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Report from the Peer Group Pressures on Learning Project
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STATEMENT OF FOCUS

The Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning focuses on contributing to a better understanding of cognitive learning by children and youth and to the improvement of related educational practices. The strategy for research and development is comprehensive. It includes basic research to generate new knowledge about the conditions and processes of learning and about the processes of instruction, and the subsequent development of research-based instructional materials, many of which are designed for use by teachers and others for use by students. These materials are tested and refined in school settings. Throughout these operations behavioral scientists, curriculum experts, academic scholars, and school people interact, insuring that the results of Center activities are based soundly on knowledge of subject matter and cognitive learning and that they are applied to the improvement of educational practice.

This Technical Report is from the Peer Group Pressures on Learning Project in Program 1. General objectives of the Program are to generate new knowledge about concept learning and cognitive skills, to synthesize existing knowledge, and to develop educational materials suggested by the prior activities. Contributing to these Program objectives, this project is directed toward identification of the effects of peer group pressures on the utilization of concepts already learned and on the learning of new concepts.

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ABSTRACT

In this experiment two variables relevant to explaining the social support phenomenon were investigated. Response position of the partner (first vs. fourth) and contact between partner and *S* prior to the group situation (contact vs. no contact) were manipulated. Male and female *S*s responded to visual, information, and opinion items in a group pressure situation. Results indicated that while social support in both the first and fourth positions significantly reduced conformity compared to a unanimous condition, support in Position 1 was significantly more effective than in Position 4. In addition, contact with the supporter increased conformity in the unanimous condition, but decreased conformity in both social support conditions. Possible mechanisms underlying the position and contact effects were discussed.

I
INTRODUCTION

Several recent investigations (Allen & Levine, 1968a, 1968b, in press) have supported Asch's (1951) conclusion that the presence of one person, answering before the naive *S* and correctly dissenting from erroneous group consensus, reduces conformity significantly compared to a unanimous group.

The present study was designed to investigate two unexplored variables of potential theoretical utility in explaining the social support phenomenon. These variables are, first, response position of the partner, and, second, brief interaction between *S* and the partner.

In studies of the effectiveness of social support in reducing conformity, typically the social supporter has answered fourth and the *S* has answered fifth (last) in a group of five persons (Allen & Levine, 1968a, 1968b, in press). Whether, however, it is crucial for conformity reduction that the social supporter respond ***immediately*** prior to *S*, and, hence, after the other group members, is open to question. Let us examine two social support situations—partner answering in either first position or fourth position—to determine factors which may differentially affect conformity reduction. As will be seen, plausible predictions of relatively greater conformity reduction can be advanced for either answering position.

The position in which the social supporter responds may influence the "gestalt" of the situation, as perceived by *S*. That is, *S* may attribute varying psychological interpretations to the relation between the supporter and the group, depending on the ordinal answering position of the partner. When the social supporter answers first, followed by three opposing responders, *S* may attribute maximum validity to the partner's responses. For only independent assessment of the stimuli, unfettered by group pressure, determined the partner's judgment. Responses of the social supporter answering fourth, though correct or popular, may be perceived as partially determined by the group, i.e., the partner may be merely an anticonformer. Thus, *S* may attribute greater ***credibility*** to the supporter answering first, rather than fourth. However, the partner responding fourth, though relatively low in credibility, has another potential advantage that may enhance his effectiveness in reducing conformity. Subjects may attribute greater ***courage*** to the later supporter because he bravely stands up against three unanimously opposing group members. This courage, in turn, may create a positive impression of the supporter that will increase his ability to free *S* from group pressure. In sum, the supporter in position four will be seen as more courageous, while the supporter in position one will be seen as more credible. Recent data on the importance of independent assessment of reality in social support (Allen & Levine, in press) lead to the prediction that a partner who responds first will be more effective in reducing conformity than will a partner who responds fourth.

Turning now to the second variable under investigation in this study, let us examine the potential influence on conformity reduction of a brief interaction between supporter and *S* prior to the experiment. In the ordinary social support situation, the partner is not differentiated from the other group member; i.e., *S* neither knows the identity of the partner nor interacts with him. However, it seems likely that contact and mutual awareness between *S* and the supporter might produce a psychological situation for *S* having implications for the supporter's efficacy in reducing conformity. First, *S*'s usual degree of anonymity in the group pressure situation is reduced by the presence of one person who knows his identity (and, as will be discussed later, his answering position). As research has consistently demonstrated (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Asch, 1956; Levy, 1960), conformity to a unanimous group varies directly with publicness of response. That is, *S*'s responses are closer to group consensus when

S's identity and answers are open to group inspection. In a similar vein, therefore, it might be hypothesized that, if *S*'s responses are monitored by only one group member, *S* will tend to respond similarly to the observer. If this observer correctly dissents from erroneous group consensus, *S* will also tend to dissent.

Second, because of mutual awareness and interaction, *S* and the supporter are differentiated from the otherwise mutually anonymous group. This explanation rests more on a reciprocal relation between *S* and the partner than does the anonymity explanation above. Here, we are suggesting that the brief interaction creates a "minimal" relationship between *S* and the partner which might influence *S*'s response in the group pressure situation. This relation might create, for instance, a felt obligation on the part of *S* to support the individual who correctly dissented from the group. Or, perhaps, the relation might produce in *S* a feeling of accountability or responsibility for his behavior in the pressure situation. This latter notion is closely related to the concept of "individuation" introduced by Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb (1952) and recently investigated by Singer, Brush, and Lublin (1965). Since *S* and the supporter are reciprocally individuated, *S*'s feelings of responsibility may be heightened by the supporter's acceptance of personal accountability, i.e., correct dissent from erroneous group consensus. Thus, the differentiation explanation, like the anonymity hypothesis above, predicts reduced conformity when *S* and the supporter interact prior to the group pressure situation.

In the present experiment, we shall investigate the influence of (1) partner's response position and (2) interaction between *S* and the partner on conformity reduction in the social support situation. It is hypothesized that social support in position one and *S*--partner interaction will produce the greatest reductions in conformity.

II
METHOD

DESIGN

A repeated measures analysis of variance design was used. The between *S*s factors were: Conditions (Unanimous, Social Support 4, Social Support 1), Contact (Contact, No Contact), and Sex of *S* (Male, Female). The within *S*s factor was Type of Item (Visual, Information, Opinion).

In the Unanimous condition, the (simulated) *S*s who answered in the first four positions agreed on each item. On critical pressure trials, the group gave answers placed at the 95th percentile of responses given by a standardization group answering alone.[1] On filler trials the group gave modal or correct answers, also obtained from the standardization group. In the Social Support conditions, one simulated *S*, answering either first or fourth in the group of five, dissented from the erroneous responses of the three other simulated *S*s on critical trials by giving modal or correct answers. On filler trials, the supporter agreed with the three simulated *S*s.

In the Contact groups each *S* interacted briefly, prior to the experiment, with a confederate who posed as another *S*. In the No Contact groups, *S*s did not meet or interact with the confederate. Male and female *S*s were tested in same-sex groups in each of the four experimental conditions described above. All *S*s saw the same stimulus series consisting of three types of items.

[1]For information and opinion items, the standardization group was 300 introductory psychology students who had filled out questionnaires in class. For visual items, the standardization group was introductory psychology students tested by Tuddenham, Macbride, and Zahn (1956).

SUBJECTS

The *S*s were 276 undergraduates, 140 males and 136 females, taking an introductory psychology course at the University of Wisconsin. Data from 21 *S*s were discarded because of their knowledge of the experimental deception, leaving a total of 255 *S*s (123 males and 132 females). The *S*s received credits applicable to their class grade for participating in the experiment.

APPARATUS

The apparatus was a Crutchfield-type electrical signaling device (Crutchfield, 1955), consisting essentially of five adjacent booths containing signal lights and answer switches, and a master control panel in an adjoining room. Subjects are led to believe, by instructions and practice trials, that signal lights in their booths indicate responses of other group members and that one person responds in each of the five answering positions. Actually, the first four lights in all booths are controlled by *E* from the master control panel, and all *S*s answer last (fifth) on all trials. Thus, *E* can provide simulated group responses that agree or disagree with *S*s' private judgments.

PROCEDURE

Contact Groups

Subjects were taken separately to private research rooms where they were left to fill out adjective checklists prior to the experiment. After about 5 minutes, *E* returned to *S*'s room with another *S* (actually, a confederate) who was told to fill out the checklist here while *E* searched for a vacant room. (The confederate had been instructed to initiate no conversation and to tactfully refrain

from discussion initiated by *S* during *E*'s absence.) The *E* left and returned about 5 minutes later, stating that a room was available for the confederate. The *E* then informed both *S* and the confederate of their answering positions in the following experimental task. In the Social Support 4 and Unanimous conditions, the confederate was told to answer fourth in the group of five. In the Social Support 1 condition, the confederate was instructed to respond first. The confederate always repeated his (her) answering position aloud, to insure that *S* had noticed it. In all three conditions *S* was told to answer last (fifth). The confederate was then taken to another *S*, until the sequence had been repeated with all four naive *S*s. Finally, the four *S*s and the confederate were taken to the experimental room.

No Contact Groups

Five naive *S*s were taken together directly from the waiting room to the experimental room.

After being seated in the five booths in the experimental room, *S*s were instructed to make accurate judgments of perceptual, information, and opinion items projected on a screen in the front of the room. Instructions and practice trials were utilized to familiarize *S*s with use of the apparatus and to convince *S*s that signal lights actually indicated responses of all group members. The *E* then presented a series of 30 stimulus slides, simulating the first four responses on each trial. At the completion of the experiment, *S*s filled out a postexperimental questionnaire. A careful debriefing followed.

STIMULI

The 30 items used in this experiment were selected from a series developed by Tuddenham, Macbride, and Zahn (1956). The items were of three types. Visual perceptual items required judgment of relationships among visual stimuli, e.g., matching the lengths of nine comparison lines against a standard. Each alternative corresponded to a number below one of the nine panel switches. Information items dealt with relatively simple factual questions, e.g., distance from San Francisco to New York. Again, these items were answered using the numbers located beneath the panel switches. Opinion items consisted of such statements as "I would never go out of my way to help another person if it meant giving up some personal pleasure" and "Most young people get too much education." These items were answered by using one of the nine labels, located below the switches, ranging from "Very Strongly Agree" to "Very Strongly Disagree."

Of the 30 items used, 12 (40%) were critical, or group pressure, items—four each of visual, information, and opinion items balanced over the series. The remaining 18 stimuli, 6 of each type, were neutral filler items.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

For each *S* a mean conformity score was calculated separately for visual, information, and opinion items. Mean conformity scores were computed by summing the algebraic differences between initial responses and responses given in the group situation and dividing by the number of items used. (For information and opinion items, initial scores were obtained from questionnaires *S*s filled out in class several weeks prior to the experiment. For visual items, modal responses of the Tuddenham et al. (1956) standardization group were used.)

III
RESULTS

PERCEPTION OF DISSENTER'S POSITION

Success of the experimental manipulation is partially reflected in the accuracy of *S*s' perception of the dissenter's answering position. Table 1 shows the proportion of *S*s in each condition who perceived another group member as frequently agreeing with them. (These data are based on responses to the postexperimental questionnaire.) Inspection of Table 1 indicates that *S*s in both the Social Support 4 and Social Support 1 conditions accurately perceived the presence and position of the dissenter (.66 and .61, respectively), while *S*s in the Unanimous condition rarely perceived either Person 1 or Person 4 as frequently agreeing with them (.07). Moreover, it is clear that the answering position of the dissenter in the two social support conditions did not differentially affect correct identification (.66 vs. .61). In addition, it appears that correct identification of the social supporter differed little in the Contact and No Contact conditions (.71 vs. .66 and .64 vs. .55). As might be expected, however, *S*s who had interacted with the confederate (Contact) were slightly more aware of the supporter's position than were *S*s in the No Contact condition.

CONFORMITY

Table 2 presents the analysis of variance conducted on mean conformity scores. Both the Conditions and Items main effects were significant at less than the .01 level. Moreover, the Conditions x Contact and Items x Sex of *S* interactions were significant beyond the .05 and .01 levels, respectively.

Mean conformity scores in the Unanimous, Social Support 4, and Social Support 1 conditions for the Contact and No Contact groups are presented in Table 3. Subsequent tests on overall condition means indicate that conformity in both the Social Support 4 (.45) and Social Support 1 (.31) conditions is significantly lower than in the Unanimous condition (.90) ($t = 6.89$, $p < .01$, and $t = 8.97$, $p < .01$, respectively). In addition, social support in position 1 (.31) produces a significantly greater decrease in conformity than does social support given immediately before *S*'s response (.45) ($t = 2.08$, $p < .05$).

Regarding the significant Conditions x Contact interaction, it is clear from Table 3 that the effect of contact on conformity varied as a function of degree of group ananimity. That is, in the Unanimous condition *S*s who interacted with the confederate conformed more than did those who had no contact (.99

Table 1. Proportion of *S*s Perceiving Another Group Member Frequently Agreeing with Them

Condition	N	Contact	No Contact	Combined
Unanimous	92	.05	.07	.07
Social Support 4	79	.71	.66	.66
Social Support 1	84	.64	.55	.61

Note.—Unanimous: proportion of *S*s perceiving either Person 4 or Person 1 frequently agreeing with them
Social Support 4: proportion of *S*s perceiving Person 4 frequently agreeing with them
Social Support 1: proportion of *S*s perceiving Person 1 frequently agreeing with them

vs. .82). However, in both the Social Support 4 and Social Support 1 conditions conformity was lower in the Contact than in the No Contact groups: .36 vs. .54, and .25 vs. .37.

Turning now to the Items main effect and the Items x Sex of *S* interaction, results are somewhat less meaningful. The significant Items effect cannot be interpreted because the three types of items differ in variability, difficulty, and susceptibility to group influence. The Items x Sex of *S* interaction is accounted for by differential conformity of male (.26) and female (.54) *S*s on Information items.

EVALUATION OF THE SUPPORTER

Ratings of the social supporter on five 12-point evaluative scales were obtained in the postexperimental questionnaire. For each scale, a separate analysis of variance was conducted using two factors: Conditions (Social Support 4, Social Support 1) and Contact (Contact, No Contact). No significant effects were obtained on ratings of the supporter's Intelligence, Accuracy, or Independence. However, on scales assessing liking for the supporter significant results were found. Subjects expressed significantly greater Personal Liking ($F = 3.41$, $p < .10$) and Group Liking ($F = 7.21$, $p < .01$) for the supporter in the No Contact than in the Contact condition. Moreover, significantly greater Group Liking was estimated by *S*s when the supporter answered first, rather than fourth ($F = 3.91$, $p < .05$). It should be noted, however, that the mean scores on both liking scales in all four Contact x Condition groups fell near the neutral point of the evaluative dimension, indicating little strong positive or negative evaluation of the supporter.

Table 2. Analysis of Variance on Mean Conformity Scores

Source	df	MS	F
Conditions (A)	2	21.07	36.33**
Contact (B)	1	.33	.57
Sex of *S* (C)	1	1.12	1.93
A x B	2	1.97	3.40*
A x C	2	1.48	2.55
B x C	1	.15	.26
A x B x C	2	1.32	2.28
Error (a)	243	.58	-----
Items (D)	2	7.29	19.18**
A x D	4	.53	1.40
B x D	2	.31	.82
C x D	2	1.96	5.16**
A x B x D	4	.54	1.42
A x C x D	4	.26	.68
B x C x D	2	.50	1.32
A x B x C x D	4	.59	1.55
Error (b)	486	.38	-----

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

Table 3. Mean Conformity Scores as a Function of Contact in the Three Conditions

Condition	Contact	No Contact	Mean
Unanimous	.99	.82	.90
Social Support 4	.36	.54	.45
Social Support 1	.25	.37	.31

IV
DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present experiment was to investigate the influences of partner's response position and interaction between *S* and partner on conformity reduction in the social support situation. As predicted, conformity was significantly lower when the supporter answered in Position 1 than in Position 4. Moreover, a significant Conditions x Contact interaction showed that while conformity was higher in the Unanimous condition with Contact than with No Contact, the inverse relationship occurred in both social support conditions; i.e., *S*s who interacted with the confederate conformed less than did those who had no contact.

Regarding the decreased conformity in the Social Support 1 condition, our hypothesis of greater perceived partner credibility receives little support from the postexperimental ratings of the supporter. That is, on the scale on which a priori differential predictions might have been made between the two social support conditions (Independence), statistically significant results were not obtained. Thus, Ss did not perceive the partner as more independent (or credible) when he answered before any group pressure had been exerted (Position 1). What, then, may mediate the greater effectiveness in reducing conformity of the partner who answered in the first position? Perhaps, *S*s are maximally sensitive to the first answer given after the stimulus is shown, because of a desire to predict how the group will respond. If so, a correct first answer, in confirming *S*'s own judgment, may produce an initial committment to the correct response that endures even though other group members disagree. If so, conformity should be quite low in the Social Support 1 condition, as found. In the Social Support 4 condition, on the other hand, the initial answer is incorrect, perhaps producing confusion in *S*. Thus, *S* would not make initial committment to the correct answer, and conformity would be somewhat higher in the Social Support 4 condition, as obtained.

Turning now to the Contact conditions, let us examine the Conditions x Contact interaction more carefully. As mentioned earlier, conformity was lower, in both social support conditions, in the Contact than in the No Contact group. Postexperimental questionnaire data indicate, interestingly, that the effect was not mediated by greater liking of the early supporter. On the contrary, *S*s rated the partner in the No Contact condition higher on the two indices of liking. Thus, the anonymity and differentiation explanations offered earlier gain some credence, in that neither was postulated on a liking relationship between the partner and *S*. Moreover, the fact that conformity in the Unanimous condition was higher in the Contact than in the No Contact group also supports, though again does not give evidence which differentiates between, the two hypothesized mechanisms underlying the Contact effect.

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